FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Smith Fence Removal and Addition
EA-OR-010-2004-01

The Bureau of Land Management, Lakeview Resource Area, has analyzed a proposal and one alternative for a project to remove approximately one mile of existing fence and install approximately one-half mile of new fence in the Cinder Butte Allotment (#902), Cinder Butte Pasture. The proposed action is considered the preferred alternative because it would eliminate an existing fencing configuration that traps livestock, which in turn impacts private land that livestock access once trapped. Other alternatives considered are either not economically feasible or would not meet management objectives.

The proposed project is in conformance with the goals and objectives of the following plans/strategies:

1) Recommended Versions of Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (1997)
2) Lakeview Resource Management Plan/Record of Decision (2003)

The following resource values or issues either are not present in the project area or would not be impacted by any of the alternatives considered: floodplains, water quality, threatened or endangered plants, fisheries, wilderness, visual quality, air quality, cultural and historic resources, paleontology, prime or unique farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, forests, land tenure, minerals or energy, wild horses, minority or low-income populations, or hazardous wastes. The potential impacts on other resource values/issues are discussed in the attached environmental assessment.

On the basis of the analysis contained in the attached EA and all other available information, it is my determination that none of the alternatives analyzed constitutes a major federal action that would adversely impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is unnecessary and will not be prepared.

Thomas E. Rasmussen, Manager
Lakeview Resource Area

2/20/04
Date

Attachment, as stated

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Smith Fence Removal and Addition
EA-OR-010-2004-01

I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of and Need for Action

The Lakeview Resource Area in the Lakeview District is proposing to implement a fence removal and installation improvement project in the Cinder Butte grazing allotment (# 902), Cinder Butte Pasture. The Cinder Butte Allotment is situated just west of Fort Rock, Oregon. The purpose of the Smith Fence Removal and Installation is to remove approximately 1 mile of existing fence to eliminate a fencing configuration that traps livestock which in turn affects private land that livestock access once trapped. Approximately one half mile of fence would be constructed utilizing the existing materials and would connect to an existing private land fence corner.

Conformance with Land Use Plans, Laws, Regulation and Policy

This proposed action is in conformance with the following plans and environmental analyses:

1) Recommended Versions of Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (1997).

2) Management direction in the Lakeview Final Resource Management Plan/ Final Environmental Impact Statement (2003).

II. ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

Alternative A – Remove Existing Fence and Install New Fence (Preferred Plan)

Approximately one mile of existing fence located at T26S., R14E., NWNW Section 7 and T26S., R13E.,S1/2 Section 12 to eliminate a fencing configuration that traps livestock which in turn impacts private land that livestock access once trapped would be removed. Approximately one half mile of fence would be constructed utilizing the existing materials located at T26S.,R14E adjacent to the western section line of section 7 and would connect to an existing private land fence corner. The fence would be constructed of steel posts and wire. It would have smooth wire 18 inches aboveground surface on the bottom the two strands of barbed wire top, with the top wire being no more than 42 inches from ground surface and a spacing of 12 inches between the top and middle wires. This type of fence is standard for deer and antelope range. No blading of the soil surface would be done along the proposed fenceline, but brush or trees may be removed by hand. The project would affect an area one mile in length and 10 feet in width for the fence

being removed and an area one half mile in length and 10 feet in width for the new fence in the Cinder Butte pasture. The permittee would be responsible for fence maintenance.

No change in the grazing system or livestock kind or numbers would result from the removal or construction of the fence(s). Utilization pattern would improve in the funnel area where livestock use was concentrated. Livestock would not be trapped due to poor fence design and escape onto private property.

Alternative B – No Action

The existing fence would remain in place. Livestock would continue to be trapped an exit through private land.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The Cinder Butte consists of gentle rolling terrain. The elevation in the project area ranges from 4100 feet to 4500feet. Average annual precipitation is ca. eight inches per year. Average monthly temperatures range from 31 in December and 70 in July. These figures are based on weather data collected at Fort Rock NOAA Station.

Use in the area is largely related to wildlife habitat, hunting and other forms of recreation. Livestock grazing is permitted in the area on rotating basis April to November.

Wildlife

The area surrounding the Cinder Butte allotment is home to a great variety of wildlife species. Special status wildlife species or their habitats that are present within this allotment include the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*), peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), burrowing owl (*Speotyto cunicularia*), kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis*), sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), and pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*). There are also three species with high public interest. These are mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), elk (Cervus elaphus) and pronghorn antelope (*Antilocapra americana*).

No nesting habitat exists within this allotment for bald eagle or peregrine falcon. It is suspected that they are occasional visitors to the area. Sporadic nesting habitat is available for ferruginous hawks on a few larger junipers within the allotment. Many suitable sites on the Lakeview District were surveyed for peregrine falcon nests in 1999, but none were located. No incidental sightings of peregrines exist within the vicinity of this allotment. There are no good foraging areas for peregrine falcons within close proximity of this allotment. No surveys have been conducted for ferruginous hawk. Ferruginous hawk foraging habitat exists through much of the allotment. Bald eagle foraging does occur within the

allotment; however it is probably restricted mostly to road killed deer adjacent to the major roadways and occasional carrion.

Burrowing owls have been observed in the vicinity of this allotment. There are no known nesting locations within the allotment. Inventories for burrowing owls were conducted on the Lakeview Resource Area in 2000 and only occasional sighting were documented.

Habitat is present for kit fox and pygmy rabbit, but no known locations exist within the allotment for these species. No inventories have been conducted for either of these species within the allotment; however there are occasional sightings within the surrounding area.

Mule deer are common throughout the allotment. This area lies within mule deer winter range. Bitterbrush is abundant in some areas and there is ample sagebrush browse for winter use. Elk are relatively uncommon within this allotment, but they do pass through on a regular basis moving from the Fremont National Forest to Connelly Hills and Hayes Butte. Pronghorn antelope occasionally frequent portions of this allotment. Use for this species is concentrated in areas without tall shrubs.

Some sage-grouse habitat exists within this allotment. There are no known lek sites with this allotment. Sage-grouse densities within the area are low when compared to other similar areas to the east. This allotment is on the edge of the range for sage-grouse and habitats are marginal in much of the area due to pine forests, juniper expansion and historic cultivation practices during the homesteading era. Within the Cinder Butte Allotment (902), approximately 50% (6000 acres) are considered non-suitable for sage-grouse. Much of the area was also cultivated during the homesteading era and has never returned to sagebrush habitats. Some western juniper also occurs in the southwestern corner of the allotment. The remaining 50% is suitable sage-grouse habitat with 1% (1000 acres) nesting, 34% (4000 acres) brood rearing and 15% (1800 acres) winter habitats respectively. There are no major conflicts for sage-grouse within this allotment.

There are numerous other species of wildlife that inhabit the project area. These include several species of migratory and non-migratory birds, amphibians, reptiles and small mammals. Habitats for these species are diverse and vary form location to location within the project area.

Vegetation

The shrub component of the native range includes western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*), mountain big sagebrush (*Artemisa tridentata*),rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus spp.*) and bitterbrush(Purshia tridentata). Grass species include Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), Thurber's needlegrass (*Stipa thurberiana*), western needlegrass (*Stipa occidentalis*), Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*) and crested wheatgrass (Agropyron. cristatum)

There are no known sites of special status plants in the vicinity of these projects. A special status plant survey was conducted and no plants were found.

Soils

The soils are sandy loam with some rocky areas See ***ESI data***

Cultural and Historic Resources

A cultural resource survey was conducted in the fall of 2003 and no cultural resources were located except a historic rock wall that is located in the project area. Fence construction would not affect the rock wall. Fence removal would have no impact because the rock wall is not located within or adjacent to the project being removed.

Range/Grazing

The planned grazing system is a deferred rotation system. The system is not fully operational at this time. The BLM and permittee are trying grazing treatments which meet plant health needs, but also fit into the permittees overall grazing operation. Two pastures are alternated for spring/summer use prior to cattle going to U.S. Forest Service administered lands. The remaining two pastures are used in the late summer/fall yearly. Pastures with bitterbrush are utilized in the spring.

Weeds

No known noxious weeds are located in the allotment or project area.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Introduction

The following resource values or issues either are not present in the project area or would not be significantly impacted by any of the alternatives considered: threatened or endangered plants, water quality, fisheries, wilderness, visual quality, air quality, cultural and historic resources, paleontology, prime or unique farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, forests, land tenure, minerals or energy, wild horses, minority or low-income populations, or hazardous wastes. These resource values/issues are not discussed further in this document.

Wildlife

Alternative A Preferred Alternative

Mule deer and antelope movements through the area may be hindered shortly after construction of the fence. Design features allowing for safe mule deer and antelope movement would be incorporated into the design features of the project to minimize affects. New fence construction could have minor negative affects to wildlife species. Sage-grouse and other birds can inadvertently collide with new fences by accidentally flying into them. The proposed project requires a relatively short amount of fence construction. This combined with the low density of sage-grouse within the area will have minimal affects to sage-grouse populations. Other negative affects to deer, pronghorn and elk come from these species getting entangled in wire while trying to cross fences. The amount of fence within the allotment will overall be reduced by one half mile and new fences constructed with wire spacings that are mule deer and antelope friendly.

Alternative B – No Action

The affects would be similar to the preferred alternative, except mule deer and antelope would not have to become acclimated to a new ½ mile segment of newly constructed fence. If no fence is constructed, the cattle will continue to congregate in the narrow fence corner north of the private lands. This could cause over utilization at a localized level in this area and would harm wildlife habitats by reducing shrub cover and over utilization of key forage plant species used by wintering mule deer. Affects to other species would probably be minimal.

Vegetation

Alternative A - Preferred Alternative

Short-term affects would occur in the area where one fence is removed and the other is constructed. Activities such as driving and walking along the fence lines and manual removal of some brush and junipers to allow for building the fence during the construction of the project would occur. These areas are expected to recover naturally in a short time period.

Alternative B- No Action

No new affects would occur because no new disturbance (removal and construction) activities would transpire.

Soils

Alternative A - Preferred Alternative

Short-term impacts would occur to soils during removal and construction of the new fence(s) through activities such as driving and walking along the fence(s). Livestock may trail along the new fence after initial construction. Presently livestock travel through the area to a water source located north of the new fence project. Similar use patterns are expected to continue by livestock. Theses types of affects are expected to be minimal and the area should fully recover.

Alternative B – No Action

No new affects would occur because no new disturbance (removal and construction) activities would transpire.

Range/Grazing

Alternative A- Preferred Alternative

Public safety would be improved because livestock would not be trapped by poor fence design and exit through private property. Livestock utilization patterns would improve because the funneling affect would be eliminated. Some trailing would occur along the new fence line after construction for a short period of time until livestock became accustomed to it.

Alternative B – No Action

No additional affects are anticipated because livestock are already accustomed to the existing fence. Livestock would continue to affect vegetation in the funnel area and would escape through private property.

Weeds

There would be no affects under any of the alternatives because noxious weeds are not present in the project area. The preferred action alternative could increase the risk of noxious weed invasion from outside areas from increased vehicle traffic and vegetation/soil disturbances during project implementation. Preventative measures (such as vehicle cleaning) would be employed during and after construction. If any weeds were inadvertently introduced into the project area or found during future surveys, they would be treated in accordance with the applicable noxious weed control plans.

V. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Alternative A - Preferred Alternative

Affects would occur during the construction phase and would include minimal short-term soil compaction from vehicles and walking. Additional affects would occur along the new fence from livestock trailing in the form soil compaction and trampling of existing vegetation.

Positive affects will result from reduced utilization in the narrow fence corner north of the private lands. This will have beneficial effect for mule deer and other wildlife species that depend on shrubs for cover. Overall, the action alternative will have less affect to wildlife than the no action alternative.

Alternative B - No Action

No additional impacts are anticipated under this alternative.

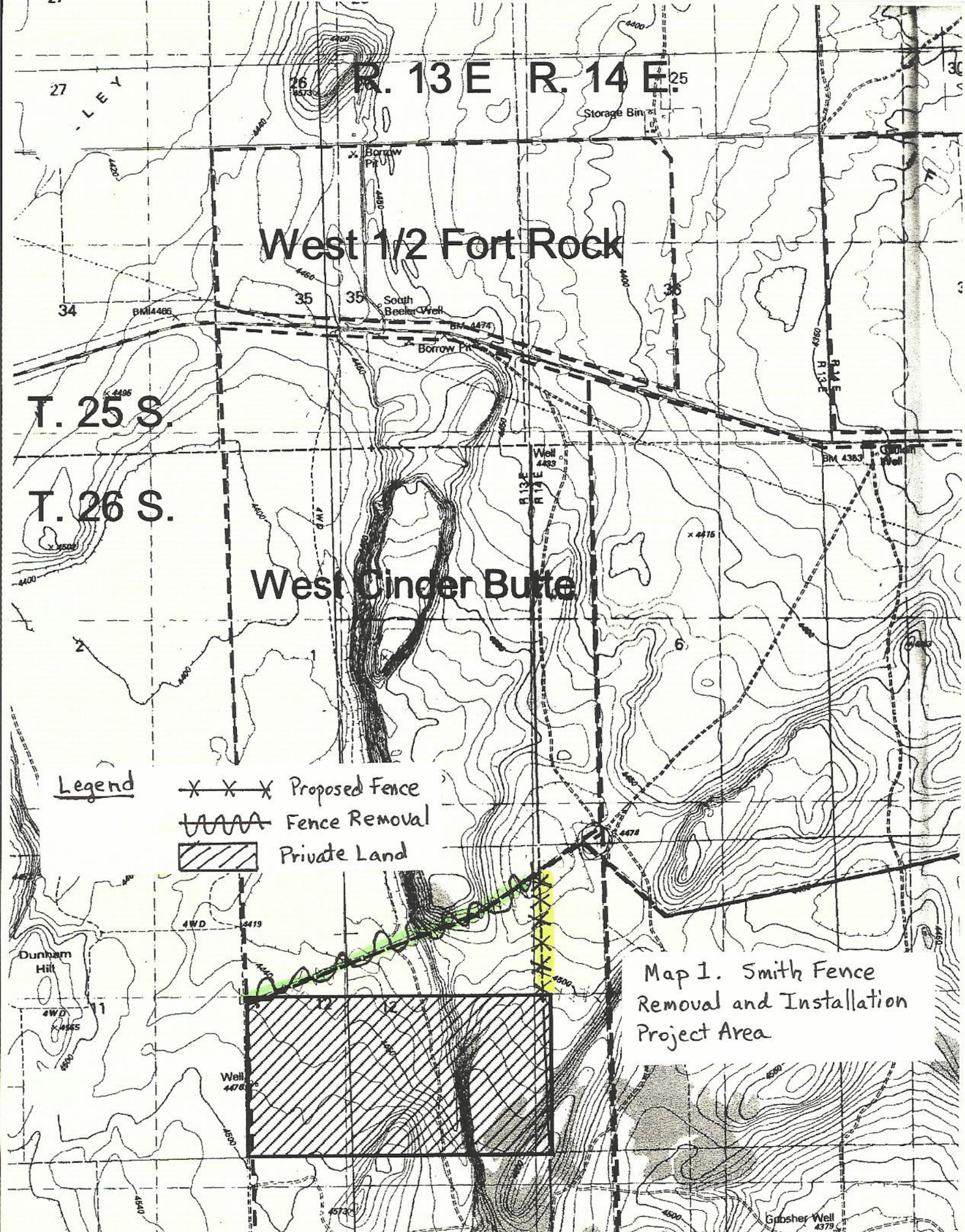
VI. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Participating Staff

Supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist	Robert Hopper
Supervisory Natural Resources Specialist	Ken Kestner
Range Management Specialist	Theresa Romasko
Botanist	Heather Partipilo
Wildlife Biologist	Todd Forbes
Archaeologist	Bill Cannon
Weed Specialist	Erin McConnell
Environmental Planner	Paul Whitman
Hydrology	Liz Berger

Persons, Groups, and Agencies that will be or have been consulted

Sam Dinsdale, permittee
Tony Smith, Private land owner



Map 1. Smith Fence Removal and Installation Project Area